



ACCOUNTABILITY BRIEF

January, 2001

Evaluation of a Pilot Project for Alternative Programs of Education for Disruptive Pupils

Assembly Bill 521 enacted by the 1999 Nevada Legislature required public school principals to establish a progressive discipline plan and a plan to review disciplinary decisions. In a survey with 248 schools responding, the majority of schools established alternative programs for disruptive students that included the three required features: separation from other students, appropriate supervision, and prohibition from extracurricular activities. Most schools did not refer students to the alternative program, however. Two barriers to the actual implementation are lack of a site to place the program and lack of personnel to provide appropriate supervision.

In addition to requiring a progressive discipline plan, AB 521 required the Superintendent of Public Instruction to establish a pilot project for alternative education programs for disruptive students in eight schools. The pilot program is an effort to determine whether an alternative education program is an effective means to remove disruptive students from the classroom and improve its learning environment. The pilot program should provide supervision, counseling, instruction, and training in self-discipline to disruptive students in a program outside the regular classroom and separated from other students not participating in the program. The present brief summarizes a recent evaluation report on the pilot alternative education programs for disruptive students. Readers must be cautioned to take some findings and conclusions as preliminary since the pilot projects had been in operation for only three to six months at the time of the evaluation.

The eight pilot projects served 219 students in grades 1-11: 131 students in elementary school (grades 1-5); 49 students in middle school grades (grades 6-8), and 39 students in high school (grades 9-12). In most cases, the alternative programs were not developed to serve students removed from the classroom by a teacher under Section 4 of AB 521. Administrators referred the majority of students (89 percent), with 11 percent referred by teachers. The main reason for referral was classroom disruption, with aggression as an additional reason for students referred by administrators and insubordination for students referred by teachers. Overall, students were in the program an average of 17.6 days, with students referred by teachers under AB 521 in the program longer (19.7 days average) than students referred by administrators (17.3 days average).

Results suggested that the eight pilot schools were not aware of all required elements of progressive discipline plans. All projects provided an instructional program and mostly kept students separate from students not in the program. Most projects provided self-discipline training and half provided additional counseling. In most instances of missing a required element, the schools were unable to address it in the first few months of implementation. Most pilot sites plan to address any missing required elements during 2000-2001 school year.

In terms of program outcomes, all eight schools submitted data but only data from five schools could be used to assess projects' impact. Preliminary evidence suggests that the pilot program may not impact the number of disciplinary referrals but may decrease the number of suspensions. Preliminary evidence also suggests that students who are in the alternative program for a longer period of time, e.g., several months, may increase their chances of school success. Again, the short time of projects' operation does not provide clear evidence of the impact of the alternative program of education.

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